

MRS. LANCASTER'S RIVAL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A FRENCH HEIRESS
IN HER OWN CHATEAU."

"Mabel, Mrs. Strange is going to take you home with her."

The invitation was repeated by Mrs. Strange, and Mabel readily consented.

On the whole Randal behaved very well. He only said to Mabel, as they were getting into the carriage, "Good-bye. You won't forget your home."

Arrived at Carwinton, and tea over, Anthony invited Mabel into the garden. There they sat and conversed.

"Mabel," he said, "you have trusted me so far; can't you trust me a little further?" She only looked at him and smiled.

"I have made a discovery," he said. "There is some one else who cares for you. He told me all about it this morning. Was he mistaken?"

"No," said she very softly. "Don't explain any more; I understand all," said Anthony.

CHAPTER XXII.

That same evening Anthony was going out into the village and met Dick at the gate.

"Yes," said Anthony, in reply to a question, "she is here; go in and see her."

"Still," said Dick desperately, "what is the use of my going in?"

"Never mind," interrupted Anthony; "go in. Say what you please to her. You will find her free."

Dick went in and was ushered in the drawing-room, where he and Mabel were left alone. An hour or so afterward, when Mrs. Strange returned to the drawing-room, Dick rose from his seat beside Mabel on the sofa, and led her forward to Mrs. Strange.

"Mrs. Strange," said he, "do you know that she belongs to me?"

"I suspected as much," said the kind old lady. "But have either of you considered what Gen. Hawke will say?" and she kissed Mabel in her good, motherly way.

"Oh, we'll manage him," said Dick. "We don't live in the days of tyrants."

When Anthony returned Dick told him of his good luck, and saying, "But I did not know till now that I had to thank you."

"Don't mention that again," said Anthony. "It is better as it is."

And Kate Northcott took possession of Mabel at once as Dick's dearest treasure, and therefore hers. A fortnight went by, and one day she and Mabel and Dick drove over in Miss Northcott's carriage, which had come for them, to her own home and St. Denis.

Mabel enjoyed the trip greatly, and it was delightful to all three. Mrs. Strange followed them in her own carriage to fetch Mabel back to Carwinton; and arriving there, they found in front of Anthony's house a brougham, which Mabel recognized as General Hawke's.

Mrs. Strange's first question to the servant who met them was:

"Is Mr. Hawke here?"

"No, ma'am; a lady. She is waiting to see Miss Ashley."

"No, ma'am."

"Who can this be, Mabel?" said Mrs. Strange, as they went into the hall. "He said something about chaperon."

When they entered the drawing-room Mabel's surprise was great to find therein the tall, dark-haired woman in black who rose from her chair to greet them, her old governess, Miss Wrench.

Mrs. Strange had heard of Miss Wrench and received her graciously. Miss Wrench took a note and gave it to Mabel saying, "Mr. Hawke was unable to come himself. I think Miss Ashley has improved in health in the country air."

"How is General Hawke to-day," asked Mrs. Strange.

"Much better," said Miss Wrench. "As that note explains I arrived last night."

The note was from Randal. It simply stated that the General was anxious for Mabel to return to Pensand. He hoped it would be entirely in her power to return to day. Thanking Mrs. Strange for her kind and pity, etc.

"Very well, my dear," said Mrs. Strange, having read the note, "we must have your things packed at once."

Mabel felt a little piqued that Mrs. Strange could give her up so easily and quietly. Did she really know that Randal was that she could thus send her back so readily?

A few moments later, when Mabel was in her room, Mrs. Strange came in and sat down in an armchair, and told Mabel how sorry she was to lose her.

"But, my dear girl," she said, "we must remember that General Hawke is your guardian after all. But I should say the sooner General Hawke and Dick understand each other, the better for all parties."

"But Randal?" said Mabel, in a tone half of fear.

"Randal has no right whatever to control you so long as his father is alive."

At Pensand Randal met them at the entrance door and spoke to Mabel with a calm self-possession. After dinner, when they looked out into the garden, Randal said: "Is it too late to go out?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mabel. "I am going up stairs now to see your father."

She found General Hawke asleep, but presently he awoke. Mabel was pleased to discover that his mind seemed clear and steady, and all the wandering had passed away from his talk. He spoke to her in low, kind tones, and his manner was so different from his old brusqueness that it made her glad, yet troubled to see it. She sat down close to his bed, and he held her hand affectionately and drew her down to his side. It almost gave Mabel a terrifying idea that he was going to die, to observe this great change in him. He spoke of Miss Wrench's coming:

"An odd fancy of Randal's, isn't it, to send for your governess again? I hope he doesn't mean her to stay long."

"Not after you are down stairs, I think," said Mabel.

"Then I'll come as soon as possible."

Then his brow clouded as he asked anxiously, "What was that story about Mrs. Lancaster, did he not want to marry her?"

"He did at one time, not now," said she. "Poor Randal," said the old man, "Have you given him any answer yet?"

"Randal has asked me a great many times," she said, "and I have given him one answer. I can not marry him. The thing is quite impossible."

The old General looked sad. "Come, Mabel," he said, "you must not do me injustice. I did enter into Randal's plan, it is true, and for many reasons; but one of them was that I liked the idea of having you for a daughter. We won't say anything to Randal about this. It would be wrong, very wrong," said the old man.

"You have never been anything but good to me," said Mabel affectionately.

Mabel sat by his side until Randal came into the room.

"How good and kind you are," said Randal.

"I like this much better than down stairs."

"Not so sorry then to be at home again?"

"If your father wants me I am glad to be here," with a glance at the General, who reclined with his eyes closed.

"Mabel, you are changed," said Randal. Tell me what it is that makes you so different. Well, some day you will tell me all, will you not?"

"I don't know, but I will tell you that," she replied, and they went down stairs.

The next few days passed very quietly, but were long and tiresome to Mabel. One afternoon Randal found her in the drawing room.

"You last," said he, "I am to speak to you unwatched by that ancient dragon."

He looked pale and vexed and worn. In answer to Mabel's inquiries as to what troubled him, he said:

"An old story to me. Money troubles. I want to raise a large sum and don't see my way to it, and I suppose we must come to a mortgage on the place."

"How much is it you require?"

"O, about ten thousand, I suppose, would put me straight."

"Now, if I were to write," said she in a quiet, tender tone, to my father's lawyers and ask them to let you have it, would they?"

He was touched by this proof of her generosity to him, so undeserved.

"No," he replied, moodily; "they certainly would not. And if they would," said he, firmly, "I could not accept it. You make me ashamed of myself."

Miss Wrench came in just then, and the conversation dropped.

Next day Randal left on the early train for London to attend to some pecuniary arrangements. Mabel sat beside the drawing-room fire with Miss Wrench.

"On the whole, then, you think it is best to be married?" said Mabel.

"It depends entirely on character," said Miss Wrench.

"I believe I shall be married some day, do you know," she said.

"My dear," said Miss Wrench, staring into the fire, "I can not say that you surprise me."

"Now, if I were to tell you, would you promise to keep it secret?"

"You know me too well to expect me to countenance anything underhanded," said Miss Wrench.

"This is not underhanded. The fact is he is coming here this afternoon. You remember him?"

"What! Is it possible—the young man on the train?"

"That very young man," said Mabel.

And here the butler opened the door, and Dick walked in. Certainly he did not seem troubled with the fear of anybody's disapproval.

Miss Wrench found it convenient to slip out of the room and left them alone.

He began at once to speak confidentially to Mabel. He was just about starting on his return to New Zealand. Could she go with him? Now was the time for them to settle the matter with her guardian.

They would go at once into the old General's room and ask his consent. They succeeded in this beyond the hope of either. It was to their great surprise and pleasure that he gave the happy pair his consent to their union, and his blessing. But with one condition—Mabel must leave Pensand at once.

"My aunt will be only too happy to receive her," said Dick.

And that very afternoon Dick, in old Fennor's boat with Mabel by his side, was rowed down Pensand Combe until they reached the foot of Miss Northcott's steps.

Miss Northcott came out to the top of the steps, having seen them from her window.

"Why, Dick, what have you been doing?" said she.

"I have only run away with her," said he. "There, Aunt Kate, take her; she belongs to you until we sail."

She put her arm around Mabel and took her into the house when everything was explained to her.

Mabel wrote to Randal and received a note of congratulation and approval of her engagement couched in such kind words as pleased and surprised her and her friend to whom she showed it.

Six weeks after Mabel and Dick were married in the old church at Carwinton, and Anthony performed the ceremony, while Randal, acting for his father, gave away the bride. In two days more the happy couple were on board the ocean steamer that was carrying them to their future home in the far Southern seas.

But a few months longer and Randal, now having it all his own way, and Flora was not able to maintain her assumed indifference. She was at length softened by his protestations of repentance and renewed affection, and his prayers came to this:

"Don't you pity me, Flora? You do you care for me still?"

And this time Flora had not the strength to say no.

THE BONES OF VASCO DA GAMA.

[Athenaeum.]

Some years ago it was proposed to bring the bones of Vasco da Gama—the body was not embalmed—to Lisbon. But the Marquis of Niza, in whose chapel at Vidigueira the remains rested, forbade their removal. The Marquis was the lineal descendant of Vasco da Gama, and took his title of Conde de Vidigueira, one of the oldest and most honorable in Portugal, from the estate which belonged to the discoverer, and tradition says that the bell of the little chapel is the same which belonged to the ship of the great Admiral. About 1838, Senhor Jose Silvestre Ribeiro, the Governor of the Province of Beja, with the authority of the Ministry, went to Vidigueira, and opened the sarcophagus of Vasco da Gama.

Strange to relate, he found a complete skeleton, but two craniums. Nothing is known which accounts for the circumstance. There is a supposition that the tomb may have been opened by marauding French soldiers during the invasion. Many tombs were thus ransacked in search of gold or jewels sometimes buried with the body. In the Dominican Convent of Batalha the four tombs of the sons of Dom John I. were violated, and many of the bones were scattered. Innumerable similar instances may be cited: In the Monastery of Alcobaca the bones of the recumbent effigies of Inez de Castro and Dom Pedro the Cruel were wantonly knocked off with a hammer.

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